

CREATING HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

HEALTHY FOOD PROCUREMENT PRACTICES IN THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

The Obesity Epidemic and Changes in the American Diet

During the past decade, the obesity epidemic has become one of the most significant threats to public health.¹ In Los Angeles County, the prevalence of adult obesity has increased from 16.7% in 1999 to 23.6% in 2011.² Among children, similar trends have been observed over this time period. Collectively, these trends highlight the magnitude of the obesity epidemic and the potential adverse effects from excess weight gain, including increased risk for heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, arthritis and several forms of cancer.¹⁻³ Annually, the obesity epidemic costs the County nearly \$6 billion in health care costs and lost productivity.⁴

Contributing to this epidemic is the increased popularity of convenience food and eating out.⁵ Compared to 30 years ago, the American diet now includes low-nutrient, calorie-dense foods and beverages that can lead to weight gain. Portion sizes over time have increased.^{5,6}

KEY FACTS

- › In Los Angeles County, the prevalence of **adult obesity has increased from 16.7% in 1999 to 23.6% in 2011.**²
- › The prevalence of **childhood obesity has increased from 18.9% in 1999 to 22.6% in 2010.**⁷

 +300 calories  +200 calories

On average, Americans eat about **300 more calories of food per day and drink 200 more calories of beverages per day** than they did 30 years ago.⁵

GOALS OF PURCHASING AND OFFERING HEALTHY FOOD AND BEVERAGES

- › **Increasing access to healthy meal, snack and beverage options.**
- › **Improving the health of employees and community members who use government programs and facilities.**
- › **Aligning foods and beverages purchased by both private and public institutions with recommendations from the USDA's *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010.***⁸
- › **Leveraging the purchasing power of large institutions to promote and increase availability and demand of healthier food options.**

Healthy Food Procurement in the County of Los Angeles

In 2010, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health launched an initiative to create healthier food environments through the adoption and implementation of nutrition standards and healthy food purchasing practices in cafeterias and other food-related programs in the County of Los Angeles government.

In support of this initiative, the County Board of Supervisors adopted a motion in 2011 requiring Public Health to review and make recommendations for all new and renewing food service and vending contracts prior to their release as Requests for Proposals.⁹ The motion requires that all food service contracts that purchase, distribute and/or sell food through County departments incorporate Public Health recommended nutrition standards and practices to the extent feasible.

Healthy Food Environments in the County of Los Angeles Government

Increasing access to affordable, healthier food provided by County department food services can improve nutrition in nearly 37 million* meals per year.

FOOD VENUES IN THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES GOVERNMENT

VENDING: Working with County departments to implement the nutrition policy¹⁰ for snack and beverage machines.

WORKSITE CAFETERIAS: Partnering with on-site cafeterias in County departments that serve meals and snacks to employees and the public to improve nutrition.

HOSPITALS: Working with County hospitals to improve nutrition of cafeteria and other concession services.

CONCESSION STANDS: Providing healthier offerings at snack shops and concessions stands at parks, beaches and other recreation facilities and buildings.

DISTRIBUTIVE MEAL PROGRAMS: Improving the nutrition of senior meals served daily and summer lunches and snacks offered to children at County program sites.

SITES SERVING INSTITUTIONALIZED POPULATIONS: Working with County jails and juvenile halls/camps to improve the nutrition in meals served each day.

CASE EXAMPLE: COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

The abundance of inexpensive, low-nutrient, calorie-dense food and beverages in community and work environments contribute to unhealthy dietary practices and increased rates of obesity. Public Health has partnered with Public Works to increase access to healthier food and beverage options for County employees and the public at the Public Works Headquarters cafeteria and vending machines in Alhambra, California. Public Health and Public Works are committed to ensuring that employees have access to healthier food and beverage options while at work.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NUTRITION IMPROVEMENTS:

- › Cafeteria menus include nutritious food choices, including entrées and side options that are lower in fat, calories and sodium.
- › Snacks in vending machines are lower in fat, calories and sodium.
- › The cafeteria menu includes nutrition information at point-of-purchase.



*This is an estimate and was extrapolated using various data sources. Snacks refer to both food and drink items.



National Efforts

Emerging use of nutrition standards in food service settings within federal, state and local government, and in private institutions:

- › **THE U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (GSA) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)** partnered to develop the Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations.¹¹ These guidelines ensure that federal employees at HHS/ GSA locations have access to healthier and more sustainable foods and beverages.
- › **THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS** established nutrition standards for all state agencies that purchase or serve food and beverages.¹²
- › **NEW YORK CITY** adopted agency-wide nutrition standards for all foods and beverages purchased or served.¹³
- › **KAISER PERMANENTE** implemented sustainable and healthy food procurement practices for patient meals, cafeterias and vending machines in medical facilities.¹⁴

What Organizations Can Do to Create Healthier Food Environments

Establishing nutrition standards and healthy food procurement practices represents a promising strategy for government and other institutions to improve their food environments. A successful food policy or intervention should consider a range of recommended approaches that meet the needs and priorities of the institution. **Some key steps that can help your organization create healthier food environments include:**

- › **EVALUATE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO UNHEALTHY EATING** and identify nutrition standards and food procurement practices that are feasible.
- › **IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS** to champion the development, adoption and implementation of the nutrition standards.
- › **SEEK ADOPTION** of the nutrition standards and develop a plan for implementation.
- › **MONITOR FOR INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE AND EVALUATE THE EFFECTS** or benefits of adopting the nutrition standards.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES TO CREATE HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

- › **2010 DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS:**
www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm
- › **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION:** Improving the Food Environment Through Nutrition Standards: A Guide for Government Procurement. *http://www.cdc.gov/salt/pdfs/dhdsp_procurement_guide.pdf*
- › **CHANGELAB SOLUTIONS:** Understanding Healthy Procurement: Using Government’s Purchasing Power to Increase Access to Healthy Food. *http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/Understanding%20Healthy%20Procurement%202011_20120717.pdf*
- › **LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH:** Comparison of Nutrition Standards and Other Recommended Procurement Practices for Improving Institutional Food Offerings in Los Angeles County, 2010-2012. *Advances in Nutrition 4:191-202, 2013.*

CHOOSE HEALTH LA is a multi-sectoral initiative to prevent and control chronic disease in the diverse communities of Los Angeles County. Supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the initiative is working with community partners to develop innovative strategies aimed at reducing tobacco use and second hand smoke exposure; improving nutrition and opportunities for physical activity; and increasing access to high quality, clinical preventive services.

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